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SPOTLIGHT

Redistricting Arms Race Leads to Mutual Assured Destruction

Democrats pivoted away from redistricting reform to fight with Republicans in the trenches.

By Kirk A. Bado

If the Democratic response to President Trump's first term was to go high, then party's response to his second term is a race to the bottom.

Seven years ago Democrats took control of the House in a blue wave fueled by voter backlash to the first half of Trump's administration. With their new majority, House Democrats introduced the For the People Act as the first official piece of legislation in the 116th Congress to channel voter frustration over Trump's alleged attempts to subvert democracy into action.

The "signature piece of legislation" would have expanded voting access, changed campaign finance laws, and contained provisions to curb gerrymandering. The bill would have mandated independent redistricting commissions in each state. The legislation passed the Democratic House in a party-line vote but died on the vine in the GOP-controlled Senate. Democrats were so committed to the reforms that they introduced the legislation at the start of both the 117th and 118th Congresses.

Fast forward to today, and Democrats are abandoning those high-minded reforms to fight with Republicans in the redistricting trenches as the White House pressures red states to redraw lines in an unprecedented power grab. Democrats are now considering their own power plays in blue states.

"All's fair in love and war. That's why I'm exploring with our leaders every option to redraw our state congressional lines as soon as possible," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) said at a news conference Monday.

"Our Democratic majorities in statehouses should not shy away from using their power to counter GOP gerrymanders—including mid-cycle redistricting," DLCC President Heather Williams said. The DLCC, which supports candidates for state legislatures, is the first official Democratic campaign arm to explicitly call for gerrymandering.

The most shocking reversal came from National Democratic Redistricting Committee Chairman Eric Holder. Eight years ago, Holder launched the NDRC to eliminate partisan interference in drawing legislative districts ahead of the 2020 apportionment process. Now confronted with Republicans' attempts to redraw lines in Texas and other states, the former attorney general compared the stakes to the rise of fascism in Europe.

"It's like the Germans have invaded France. Are you going to just say, 'Well, we're against war and we're for the resolution of disputes in a peaceful way'? Sometimes you have to take up arms," Holder told the *New York Times* over the weekend.

Democrats are pivoting from arms reduction to a redistricting arms race. Whether or not they're successful is yet to be determined, but as they go further down this path of zero-sum politics, one thing is certain: Trump has already won by lowering the political discourse to his level.

— Kirk A. Bado

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Quote of the Day

"I'm sure that will be very spirited." — Rep. Mike Flood (R-NE 01) joking before a raucous town hall, Semafor, 8/4

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Trump says he will 'probably not' seek reelection

By Erika Filter

REPUBLICANS: Laura Loomer Enjoys Direct Line to Trump

"While those close to the president caution that" 2020 FL-21 nominee Laura Loomer's (R) influence with President Trump "only goes so far—something Loomer acknowledges—they say it's undeniable that her persistence and loyalty have paid off."

- **HOW IT'S MADE.** "In her own telling, corroborated by people around Trump, Loomer's ability to capture the president's attention and sometimes influence his actions is hardly mysterious. She uncovers information she believes will be of interest to him, passes it along to Trump officials, then pushes it out publicly in lengthy posts on X, on her website or on her weekly streaming show, 'Loomer Unleashed.' She is confident the reports will get to the president, given her reputation as a trusted ally."
- **NOT QUITE PARADISE.** "Loomer applied for a press pass to cover the Trump White House and considered moving to Washington, where she employs one correspondent. But neither of their applications have been approved, despite repeatedly asking about the status of receiving credentials."

- **THE BOTTOM LINE.** “As with other influencers, Loomer has sought to use her elevated status on the right-wing web as a revenue stream. On the crowdfunding site Buy Me a Coffee, where Loomer directs X followers seeking to support her work, she has raised nearly \$50,000 to help cover her ‘research and travel expenses’ and other costs associated with her ‘investigative reports.’” (*Washington Post*)

WHITE HOUSE: Trump Criticizes Past Jobs Reports

President Trump called the latest jobs report and a report before the 2024 election “antiquated,” “political,” and “rigged” in an interview on CNBC Tuesday morning, days after he fired the Bureau of Labor Statistics commissioner.

- **TRUMP SAYS:** “They gave phony numbers in order to win the election.”
- **NAMING REPLACEMENTS.** He named White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett and former Fed official Kevin Warsh, along with two other unnamed individuals, as potential replacements for Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell.
- **CLUES FOR THE FUTURE.** Trump also said he would “probably not” seek reelection. (*Hotline* reporting)
- **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT DEEPENS PROBE.** The Justice Department is opening a grand jury probe into allegations that the Obama administration improperly investigated Russia’s involvement in the 2016 election. Attorney General Pam Bondi “personally ordered an unnamed federal prosecutor to initiate legal proceedings and the prosecutor is expected to present department evidence to a grand jury, which would allow the department to secure a potential indictment.” (Fox News)
- **NICE WORK.** Trump said on CNBC he had nothing to do with the investigation but that Bondi was doing a “great job.” (*Hotline* reporting)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Independent Senate hopefuls target red-state incumbents

By Nicholas Anastácio

BATTLE FOR THE SENATE: Red-State Senate Hopefuls Look for Independence

2024 NE SEN candidate Dan Osborn (I) is back for another Senate campaign, joined by a handful of other independent Senate hopefuls in red states.

- **FOUR INDEPENDENCE.** Osborn, along with former Idaho state Rep. Todd Achilles (I), 2024 MS SEN nominee Ty Pinkins (I), and 2022 SD SEN nominee Brian Bengs (I), all told *Hotline* they’re looking to take advantage of partisan dissatisfaction while challenging safe GOP incumbents in solidly Republican seats.
- **OSBORN SAYS:** “People are sick of the status quo. ... They’re sick of what they see in Washington: people trading stocks and getting rich, and both parties not really working together and getting anything done.”
- **OSBORN’S REDEMPTION ARC.** Osborn is facing a different and more prepared opponent in Sen. Pete Ricketts (R-NE). He hopes an early start and a higher name identification could help him target voters in the solidly Republican NE-03 and get over the finish line.

- **DEMS IN THE WAY.** Achilles, Bengals, and Pinkins—all former Democrats—are expected to compete against Democrats in a general election, an issue Osborn isn't likely to face. All three also need resources to match Osborn's operations and compete against senators with multimillion-dollar war chests. (*Hotline* reporting)

ALASKA: Reelection Looks Bleak for Murkowski

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R) didn't commit to a 2028 reelection bid as she kept the door open on a run for governor. Murkowski emphasized that her reelection is roughly four years away, adding: "What I'm trying to do is not win elections." (Alaska Public Media)

- **POLL POSITION.** An Alaska Survey Research poll (July 29-Aug. 1; 1,958 RVs; +/-2.3%) found Murkowski's favorability underwater following her vote to pass the OBBB. The survey showed 60% had negative feelings toward her and 33% had positive feelings.
- **COMPARISON.** Murkowski had a positive favorability split of 47%-44% in a January survey and 46%-45% in an April survey.
- **IDEOLOGY.** Between April and July, her favorability split went from 75%-21% to 38%-59% among progressives; 57%-29% to 49%-47% among moderates, and 15%-79% to 17%-81% among conservatives. (release)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Murkowski won reelection against 2022 candidate Kelly Tshibaka (R) under her first ranked-choice voting election by appealing to moderate and progressive voters. Her OBBB vote has disappointed both blocs, making a reelection bid and a run for governor difficult for the senator.

IOWA: Michelle Obama's Former Chief of Staff Joins Race

Des Moines School Board Chair Jackie Norris (D) jumped into the crowded Democratic primary to take on Sen. Joni Ernst (R).

- **TRACK RECORD.** Norris, a former chief of staff to former first lady Michelle Obama, highlighted her past career as a teacher while focusing on affordability in her campaign launch video. Without mentioning Ernst by name, Norris voiced her opposition to the OBBB's Medicaid cuts and touted her efforts to remove cellphones from classrooms across the Des Moines school district.
- **RESUME.** Norris has deep roots in Iowa politics. She worked on former Gov. Tom Vilsack's (D) 1998 campaign and former President Obama's 2008 Iowa caucus campaign, serving as state director for the general election. Her husband, 2018 GOV candidate John Norris (D), has also been involved in Iowa politics.
- **FOUR FOR NOW.** She joins state Sen. Zach Wahls (D), former Knoxville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Nathan Sage (D), and 2020 IA-04 nominee J.D. Scholten (D) in the primary. (KTIV)
- **A FIFTH?** State Rep. Josh Turek (D) is reportedly preparing to enter the race this month. State Reps. Austin Baeth (D) and Timi Brown-Powers (D) and former state Rep. Sami Scheetz (D) have discussed the campaign with Turek, and are prepared to back his bid when he enters. (*Des Moines Register*)

ILLINOIS: Darin LaHood Passes on Senate Run

Rep. Darin LaHood (R-16) passed on a bid to replace retiring Sen. Dick Durbin (D), pursuing reelection to the House instead. (WMAQ)

- **JOIN THE REST OF US.** Former RNC Committeeman Richard Porter (R) said he wouldn't pursue a campaign for the open seat on Sunday, dampening GOP hopes for a potential flip in the blue state. (*Illinois Playbook*)

OHIO: Sherrod Brown's Making Hiring Moves

Former Sen. Sherrod Brown (D) is interviewing campaign managers for a potential bid to unseat Sen. Jon Husted (R).

- **GET BACK TO D.C.** Minority Leader Chuck Schumer visited Brown twice this summer, pushing him to run for the Senate again after his 2024 loss to Sen. Bernie Moreno (R). Brown lost by less than 4 points while former Vice President Kamala Harris lost the state by more than 10 points.
- **CHOOSE ONE.** Ohio Democrats have considered Brown as more likely to launch a gubernatorial bid next year, viewing 2024 presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy (R) as weaker in a general election than Husted. (*Axios*)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Despite hosting one of the most competitive Senate races in 2024, Ohio found itself off *Hotline's* first Senate Power Rankings of the 2026 cycle. If Brown enters the Senate race, Ohio could certainly catapult its way back onto our list. Brown isn't guaranteed to win against Husted, but he could force Republicans to spend more to defend the seat.

TEXAS: Ken Paxton Courts Trump Endorsement in Scotland

State Attorney General Ken Paxton (R) quietly traveled to Turnberry, Scotland on July 26 to talk with President Trump about his primary fight against Sen. John Cornyn (R) at the president's golf resort. The two didn't play a round together, but "spoke privately for several minutes about the Texas race."

- **QUIET COURTING.** The White House initially denied the encounter took place, but declined to comment when asked again on Monday. (CNN)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Democrats plot for five GOP seats in California

By James A. Downs and Amelia Monroe

REDISTRICTING ROUNDUP: California Plan Could Axe Five GOP Seats

Members of the California Legislature were briefed on the potential redistricting push headed by Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) if Texas follows through with its redistricting plan. "Newsom is eyeing a special election in November of this year to ask voters to temporarily restore the power to draw those maps back to the California legislature for the first time in two decades."

- **BY THE NUMBERS.** Legislators "were shown polling around the possible ballot measure that could be presented to voters in the November special election which had 52% of those polled voting yes" to adopting "new California congressional districts passed by the Legislature for use in congressional elections through 2030." The measure would also be contingent on whether Texas adopts new lines or not. 41% were opposed and 7% were undecided. (KCRA)
- **CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'.** Members of California's congressional delegation were also shown slides that envisioned wiping out all but four Republican-held seats. California Democrats currently hold a 43-9 advantage in Congress. (*Politico*) The new map would target Reps. Doug LaMalfa (R-01), Kevin Kiley (R-03), David Valadao (R-22), Ken Calvert (R-41), and Darrell Issa (R-48). The lines would "would comply with the Voting Rights Act." (*Punchbowl News*)

- **HE IS BACK.** Former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) plans to campaign against Newsom's potential redistricting proposal. Schwarzenegger led the fight to establish independent redistricting commissions in California while governor and is "reuniting" with donors and government transparency groups to oppose the Newsom measure. (*California Playbook*)
- **THE TRUMP LOGIC.** During an appearance on CNBC this morning, President Trump doubled down on his calls for Texas to draw news lines. Trump said: "We are entitled to five more seats." (*Hotline* reporting)
- **TEXAS DEMS FACE THE LEGAL SYSTEM.** The Texas House voted to arrest the more than 50 Democratic lawmakers who fled the state in protest of the proposed congressional map. House Speaker Dustin Burrows (R) said he would sign civil arrest warrants, enabling "the chamber's sergeant-at-arms and state troopers to arrest and bring them to the Capitol."
- **ALL BARK NO BITE.** The arrest warrants are "largely symbolic," as they won't face charges and "apply only within state lines." Gov. Greg Abbott (R) also announced he "mobilized the Texas Department of Public Safety to assist in the effort to bring the missing members back to the chamber." (*Texas Tribune*)
- **ON TRUMP.** A White House official said the administration is taking a "hands-off approach" to the unfolding drama between Texas Republicans and Democrats.
- **REPUBLICAN OPTIONS.** In addition to ordering their arrests and threatening to remove them from their seats, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton (R) said he thinks the governor will be "forced into calling several special sessions."
- **DEMS NOT BACKING DOWN.** Texas Rep. Jolanda Jones (D), who is in New York, pushed back against Abbott's threats of arrest. "There is no felony in the penal code for what he says. So respectfully, he's making up shit." (*Politico*)
- **TIMELINE.** Texas Democrats who fled to Illinois plan to stay until Aug. 19, when the special session ends. Abbott could call another special session, which "could bring the Democrats back to Illinois for another 30 days."
- **RALLY THE TROOPS.** DNC Chair Ken Martin will appear with Texas lawmakers at a rally in Aurora later today. (*Illinois Playbook*)
- **LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS.** As redistricting wars escalate, Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA 03) introduced a bill that would prevent any new maps from taking effect before the 2030 Census. Kiley takes aim at California Democrats and Newsom but does not mention Texas. The legislation, Kiley said, would "stop a damaging redistricting war from breaking out across the country." (release)
- **VP ENTERS REDISTRICTING FRAY.** Vice President JD Vance may travel to Indiana this week to speak to Indiana Gov. Mike Braun (R) about a potential effort to wipe out one or two Democratic seats in the Hoosier State. "The Indiana legislature could prove a big hurdle here. The state legislative leaders are immensely powerful and it's not clear there's any appetite among them to redistrict." (*Punchbowl News*)

ILLINOIS 07: Anthony Driver Hits the Campaign Trail

Union leader Anthony Driver Jr. (D) launched a bid to succeed Rep. Danny Davis (D), who recently announced he will retire at the end of the term. Driver currently serves as the executive director of the SEIU Illinois State Council, which creates and implements the "political and legislative agenda for the union." (release)

- **THE FIELD.** Driver enters a burgeoning field with Davis now on the sidelines. State Rep. La Shawn Ford (D), Chicago City Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin (D), and businessman Jason Friedman (D), among others, are running.

KENTUCKY 04: Trump Group Goes Back on Air

MAGA Kentucky, the pro-Trump super PAC opposing Rep. Thomas Massie (R), released a new ad that responds to Massie's own ad about his vote against government-spending measures.

- **DETAILS.** The spot, titled "Fighting," says Massie is not fighting for "the single moms who no longer pay taxes on their tips ... the police officers who no longer pay taxes on their overtime ... [or] the seniors who no longer pay taxes on Social Security." The ad is backed by a six-figure buy. (*NOTUS*)

PENNSYLVANIA 01: Attorney Objects to Fitzpatrick's Reelection Bid

Attorney Tracy Hunt (D) confirmed his bid to unseat Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R). In his campaign launch video, Hunt touted his switch from the Republican to Democratic Party after "watching Republicans embrace authoritarianism" with President Trump.

- **SPLIT-TICKET ISSUES.** The Democratic Party has historically struggled to snatch power in the Bucks County district. In recent elections, the district consistently "reelects Fitzpatrick despite voting for Democrats at the top of the ticket." In 2024, Fitzpatrick won the district by more than 12 points, despite former Vice President Kamala Harris carrying the district by 1 point.
- **THE FIELD.** Hunt will be facing off against Bucks County Supervisor Bob Harvie (D). Other potential Democratic candidates include state Rep. Bridget Kosierowski, Pittston Mayor Michael Lombardo, and state Sen. Marty Flynn. (*Punchbowl News*)

SOUTH CAROLINA 01: Democrat Opts for a Another Bid

2024 candidate Mac Deford (D) is launching his comeback campaign after Rep. Nancy Mace's (R) decision to run for governor. Deford is "hoping the second time's the charm" after losing in last cycle's primaries by 684 votes.

- **NO EASY FEAT.** The district stretches throughout Beaufort and Berkeley county, both Republican strongholds in the state. *The Cook Political Report with Amy Walker* labeled the district as solidly Republican, "with a built-in 6-point GOP advantage." Deford is the only confirmed Democratic candidate to have entered the race at this point. (*Charleston Post and Courier*)

TEXAS: Liberal Group Leverages OBBB Criticism Amid Redistricting Uncertainty

Unrig Our Economy, a liberal outside group, launched a more than \$350,000 ad that targets Rep. Tony Gonzales (R-23) for his support of President Trump's tax and spending bill. The buy is the latest attack in a larger \$2 million effort from the group that bashes state GOP members for voting yes on the reconciliation package.

- **SAFE AND SOUND.** Aside from Gonzales, the attack ad campaign has gone after Reps. Dan Crenshaw (R-02), Lance Gooden (R-05), Monica De La Cruz (R-15), and Beth Van Duyne (R-24), all of whom represent districts that may see their lines redrawn amid redistricting efforts. The "Texas gerrymandering may leave the state's incumbents in fairly red seats" going into 2026. (*Punchbowl News*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Mikie Sherrill holds single-digit lead over Jack Ciattarelli in another poll

By Abby Turner

ALASKA: Lisa Murkowski Doesn't Turn Down Potential Gubernatorial Bid

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R) “toyed with the idea of running for governor,” saying “‘sure’ when asked if she has considered or is considering a run for governor. She later said her response was ‘a little bit flippant’ because she gets asked that question so often.” (AP)

CALIFORNIA: Stephen Cloobek Launches Ad Focused on Trump, Jeffrey Epstein

Businessman Stephen Cloobek (D) “is spending \$1.4 million on television ads starting” today in “the first barrage of cable and broadcast messaging that Californians will likely be bombarded with in next year’s governor’s election.”

- **EPSTEIN IN CALI.** The spot is entirely about President Trump’s relationship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. “Cloobek bought space in every California market on cable” and is also airing the ad in New York City, Washington, D.C., and West Palm Beach, where Mar-a-Lago is located. (*Los Angeles Times*)
- **EARLY BIRD.** Cloobek is the first candidate in the race to launch a cable ad. Former Rep. Katie Porter (D) released digital ads, according to AdImpact data.

COLORADO: Dem Candidates Criticize Dark Money While Benefiting from Super PACs

Sen. Michael Bennet (D) and Attorney General Phil Weiser (D) “are two of the most vocal critics of dark money in politics” but are both “poised to benefit from dark money donors in” their gubernatorial campaigns.

- **EACH HAVE SUPER PACS.** “Bennet allies registered the state-level super PAC Rocky Mountain Way days after he entered the race in April and raised \$950,000 in its first three months,” while Weiser allies formed a super PAC in July.
- **STAYING QUIET.** Neither candidate, both of whom the End Citizens United/Let America Vote political action committee endorsed in the past, “appears willing to speak out against the dark money in the race.” (*Axios Denver*)

FLORIDA: Jay Collins Calls for Primary Opponent Against Byron Donalds

State Sen. Jay Collins (R) said “someone needs to take on” Rep. Byron Donalds (R-19), but has yet to say whether he’ll be that candidate. His decision will likely hinge on who Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) taps to fill the lieutenant governor’s seat, which has sat vacant for three months. (*Florida Phoenix*)

- **POSSIBLE DEM OPPONENT.** Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings (D) is considering running for either statewide or federal office. If he ran for governor, he would challenge former Rep. David Jolly (D). (*Florida Playbook*)

GEORGIA: Latino Victory Fund Endorses Jason Esteves

The Latino Victory Fund endorsed state Sen. Jason Esteves (D) in the primary as he faces former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms (D) to succeed term-limited Gov. Brian Kemp (R). “The endorsement comes with political help, including a pledge to ‘fill the gaps’ with resources such as consultants and contractors to assist campaign operations.”

- **MAKING HISTORY.** If elected, he “wouldn’t just become Georgia’s first Black governor. He’d be the first Latino governor, too.” (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

ILLINOIS: Darin LaHood Decides Against Challenging Pritzker

Rep. Darin LaHood (R-16), who considered a challenge to Gov. JB Pritzker (D), announced yesterday that he will not run for governor but will seek reelection to the House. (WMAQ)

KENTUCKY: State Republicans Want James Comer for Governor

Already looking ahead to 2027, “it’s no longer speculation; it’s an assumption” that Rep. James Comer (R-01) will run to succeed term-limited Gov. Andy Beshear (D). Statewide leaders “lit up” the prospect of a Comer run at a breakfast before Fancy Farm over the weekend.

- **A LONG TIME COMING.** “Comer’s flirtation with the governor’s mansion next cycle has been clear since at least election night 2024, after he earned his most recent term in Congress, if not earlier.” (*Lexington Herald-Leader*)

NEW JERSEY: Another Poll Shows Mikie Sherrill with Single-Digit Lead

A poll (July 18-24; 1,108 LVs; +/-3.3%) conducted by StimSight Research for *InsiderNJ* found Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-11) narrowly leading 2021 nominee Jack Ciattarelli (R), 48%-42%. (*New Jersey Globe*)

- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** This poll marks another single-digit lead for Sherrill, following last week’s poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University. Both are a far cry from July’s Rutgers-Eagleton poll that had Sherrill 20 points ahead. As the race enters its final weeks, expect credible polling to show a narrow race between Sherrill and Ciattarelli.

VIRGINIA: Winsome Earle-Sears Casts Doubt on Polling, Media Amid Campaign Struggles

Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears (R) “is leaning into skepticism about polling and the media with less than 100 days until the election” as she trails former Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D) in polling and fundraising. “Earle-Sears continued to attack the media on Friday, saying they are reporting false fundraising numbers to try to help Spanberger,” and told supporters “don’t believe” polling numbers. (*Virginia Scope*)

WISCONSIN: Former Governor Hasn’t Ruled Out Fifth Term

Former Gov. Tommy Thompson (R) “has not ruled out another run for governor” after Gov. Tony Evers (D) declined to run for a third term.

- **THOMPSON SAYS:** “There are a lot of good candidates and I don’t have a desire to get in the race, but the truth of the matter is I’ll wait to see what’s out there.”

- **FIFTH TIME.** “Thompson, who is now 83-years-old, is the longest-serving governor in Wisconsin history and is the only person to be elected to the office four times.” (WTMJ)
- **ON THE CALENDAR.** Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-07) will make a decision about running for governor in the next 30-60 days, he said. (Spectrum News 1)

OVERLOOKED

Presidential Academic Associations

By Amelia Monroe

President Trump has made defunding universities a prominent part of his second term. The basis of these attacks are accusations that Harvard and other comparable universities are breeding grounds for antisemitism and ideological propaganda, forcing them to mitigate the blow out in any way possible. Trump’s methods could be considered unprecedented, as other presidents have gone out of their way to foster relationships among some of the country’s most recognized colleges: In 1796 President Washington donated 100 of his shares from the James River and Kanawha Canal Company to Liberty Hall Academy, which was later renamed Washington and Lee University for the president’s donation. Starting in 1779 President Jefferson proposed a university in Virginia, then spent over a decade helping its construction through donations and architecture plans—creating the University of Virginia.